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AUTHOR Schaupp, Diane S.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

While recent research has examined some qualities that are related to marital adjustment, none has examined personal development variables that might be expected to significantly relate to marital adjustment and to gender-role self-concept. A study was conducted to examine relationships among gender-role self-concepts, personal development, and marital adjustment. Data from 107 middle-class couples in long-term marriages (M=21.93 years married) were obtained from a marital adjustment scale, the shortened Bem Sex Role Inventory, Shostrom's Personal Orientation Inventory, and a demographic questionnaire. Descriptive path analyses revealed some similarities consistent with past research. There were, however, many differences in predictors of marital adjustment for women and men. The results revealed that for men, femininity, self-regard, and inner-directedness were related to marital adjustment with masculinity indirectly related. For women, femininity, existentiality, self-regard, and self-acceptance were found to be related to marital adjustment. The most striking finding was the isolation of masculinity for women. These finding suggest that the connections between femininity and marital adjustment are similar for both men and women but the connections for masculinity are strikingly different. (Author/NB)

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Similarities and Differences in Predictors of Marital Adjustment for Men and Women

Diane S. Schaupp
Teacher's College, Columbia University
Agnes N. O'Connell and Edward J. Haupt
Montclair State College

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Abstract

Data from 107 middle-class couples in long-term marriages (M = 21.93 years married) were obtained from (a) a marital adjustment scale; (b) the shortened Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI); (c) Shostrom's Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) and (d) a demographic questionnaire. Descriptive path analyses revealed some similarities consistent with past research, however, there were many differences in predictors of marital adjustment for women and men. For men, femininity, self-regard and inner-directedness were related to marital adjustment with masculinity indirectly related. For women, femininity, existentiality, self-regard, and self-acceptance were related to marital adjustment. The most striking finding was the isolation of masculinity for women.

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Similarities and Differences in Predictors

of Marital Adjustment for Men and Women

Diane S. Schaupp

Teacher's College, Columbia University

Agnes N. O'Connell and Edward J. Haupt

Montclair State College

The purpose of the present study is to examine relationships among gender-role self concepts, personal development (self actualization), and marital adjustment. Recent research (Zakerin, 1984; Antill, 1983) has dealt with some qualities that are related to marital adjustment but the variables in these studies were limited in scope and dealt with either interpersonal or gender-role self concepts but none examined personal development variables, variables that might be expected to significantly relate to marital adjustment and to gender-role self concept. Zakerin (1984) explored interpersonal relationship variables, for example; love, respect, communication, and trust in relationship to marital adjustment and Antill (1983) studied gender-role self concepts in relationship to marital adjustment. Neither examined the relationships among personal development variables, gender-role self concepts and marital adjustment.

Our hypotheses for this study were based on previous research. Antill (1983) found femininity related to marital adjustment in an Australian sample of long-term

marriages suggesting that we might find it too. It was hypothesized also that the predictors for men and women for marital adjustment would differ. Field and Weishaus (1984) found that husbands and wives view their marriages differently and that their sources of satisfaction differ. In addition, the relationships of masculinity and personal development to marital adjustment for men and women were explored.

Method

Subjects

Respondents were husbands and wives in 107 married couples. They lived in middle-class, suburban communities within 50 miles of New York City or adjacent to a medium-size city in upstate New York.

All respondents completed high school. Among the men, 43.4% had some college, and 24.5% had four or more years of college. Among the women, 38.3% had some college and 42% had four or more years of college. According to Coleman and Rainwater's (1978) criteria, 14.5% were lower-middle class, 45.5% were middle-middle class, and 40.8% were upper-middle class.

The mean length of marriage was 21.9 years; 60% had been married between 15 and 25 years. Only 2% of the individuals in the couples had previous marriages. The mean number of children was 2.7 per couple with a range from 0 to 6 children. Of all the couples, 9.3% had no children.

Procedure

Names and telephone numbers of possible respondents were obtained from service organizations in local communities as well as through referrals from friends and acquaintances. Each couple identified was contacted by telephone and asked to participate in a study about married couples. If they agreed, an appointment was made to deliver a sealed, unmarked packet of questionnaires. The answered questionnaires were picked up the next night. In 11 of the 118 couples contacted, one of the members of the couple did not complete the questionnaire, and these were excluded from data analysis.

Instruments

The packet delivered to each couple included (a) a demographic questionnaire, (b) a marital adjustment scale (Locke and Wallace, 1959), (c) the shortened version of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1981), and (d) Shostrom's (1965) Personal Orientation Inventory. Each person was encouraged to answer frankly and to fill out his/her own forms without discussion, consultation or knowledge of their partner's responses.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive path analyses were created by using a stepwise multiple regression procedure (SAS Proc Stepwise) to predict marital adjustment (MATOT) using the BSRI (masculinity and femininity) scores, Shostrom's POI scores, and length of marriages (LNGMAR) as predictors. The results

of these analyses are shown separately for husbands and wives of the couples in Figures 1 and 2.

The path coefficients found for men and women supported previous research (Antill, 1983) in that BSRI femininity scores, as examples of expressive traits, were predictive of marital adjustment for both men (path coefficient, .322) and women (path coefficient, .291). Length of marriage was also a predictor of the BSRI femininity scores for both men (path coefficient, .253) and women (path coefficient, .171). While this path coefficient is less than .20, it is significant because of the size of sample and because the presence of other predictors reduces the error term. Self-regard on the POI was also predictive of marital satisfaction for both men (path coefficient, .117) and women (path coefficient, .234).

There were several differences between men and women in the path models. These findings support Field and Weishaus (1984) who also found differences between husbands and wives in sources of marital adjustment. For men in the present study, masculinity directly predicted femininity scores (path coefficients, .280) which then indirectly predicted marital adjustment via the femininity variable. The masculine score was in turn predicted by two of the POI variables, holding to self-actualizing values (SAV; path coefficient, .634) and Synergy (SY; path coefficient, -.200). In the present study, the men seem to self-actualize along the lines

of their gender-role self concept and not along the lines of integration of opposites (synergy).

Other differences between men and women are apparent in the additional (POI) predictors of marital satisfaction. For men, inner directedness (I: path coefficient, -.354) was negatively related to marital adjustment. Perhaps because inner directedness is based on autonomy, the compromise necessary to sustain and maintain a marital relationship becomes difficult. For women, both existentiality (EX; path coefficient, -.376) and self-acceptance (SA; path coefficient, .264) were related to marital adjustment. EX suggests that living in the present may be inconsistent with the commitment to long-term goals that are necessary for a satisfactory marriage. According to Shostrom it is more difficult to achieve self-acceptance than self-regard because this implies being able to accept one's weaknesses as opposed to one's strengths. Being able to accept one's weaknesses may result in being able also to accept a spouse's weaknesses thereby increasing marital harmony and adjustment.

The POI variables related to the BSRI femininity scale were different for men and women. For men, the BSRI femininity scale and the POI self-regard (SR) scale were related variables (path coefficient, .189). For women, the BSRI femininity scale was predicted by both self-actualizing values (SAV; path coefficient, .299) and feeling reactivity

(FR; path coefficient, -.229). The women in this study, like the men, seem to self-actualize along their gender-role self concept. Shostrom defines feeling reactivity as being able to express one's feelings in the "here and now". These women may inhibit this expression because they place the feelings of others above their own but this inhibition may mitigate against their own marital adjustment.

For women, the masculine (instrumental) role is predicted by several POI scales, but is unrelated to either feminine values or marital adjustment. The predictors of masculine scale scores include inner directedness (path coefficient, .437), self-regard (path coefficient, .289), acceptance of aggression (path coefficient, .331), and existentiality (path coefficient, -.376). These qualities for women are related to instrumental (masculine) aspects of their personality and not to marital adjustment. The masculine scale measures socially desirable "instrumental" traits which emphasize the enhancement of self and the feminine scale measures socially desirable "expressive traits" which emphasize the enhancement of the immediate community (Parsons and Bales, 1955). These personal development variables may be more reflective of the enhancement of self than the enchancement of shared living.

A striking finding of these path analyses is the isolation of instrumental (masculine) values for the females from either feminine values or marital adjustment, even

though these values are connected to a variety of sources of self-actualization. It may be that in general these women are able to apply values and principles in a flexible manner, according to the situation and to exhibit masculine or instrumental behavior when appropriate. However in their marriages they may utilize their masculine characteristics in a "now-you-see-it-now-you-don't phenomenon" (Alper, 1974), resulting in the isolation of these characteristics with the hope of minimizing tension in the relationship.

In the present study, the relationship among personal development (self-actualization), gender-role self concepts, and marital adjustment were separately delineated for men and women and considerably extend previous research (Antill, 1983; Field and Weishaus, 1984). This study clarifies the significant relationship of femininity to marital adjustment for middle-class men and women in long-term marriages. For men, not only femininity but, self-regard and inner-directedness were significantly related to marital adjustment with self-regard related to both femininity and marital adjustment. Masculinity was significantly related to femininity, which in turn fed into marital adjustment. For women, in addition to femininity, existentiality, self-regard, and self-acceptance were significantly related to marital adjustment with existentiality and self-regard significantly related to both masculinity and to marital adjustment. Although masculinity was related to personal development, it was not related to

femininity or marital adjustment for women. It is noteworthy that for men and women self-regard was related to cross-gender role self concepts (i.e., masculinity for women, femininity for men) and to marital adjustment.

Perhaps what is most intriguing about this research is the strong connection for women between self-actualization and masculinity but the lack of connection between (a) masculinity and femininity and (b) masculinity and marital adjustment. For men, masculinity and femininity are connected and masculinity is a secondary determinant for marital adjustment. For women, masculinity is a determinant for neither. On the other hand, femininity is a primary factor for marital adjustment for both men and women. It seems clear that for this sample, the connections between femininity and marital adjustment are similar for both men and women but the connections for masculinity are strikingly different.

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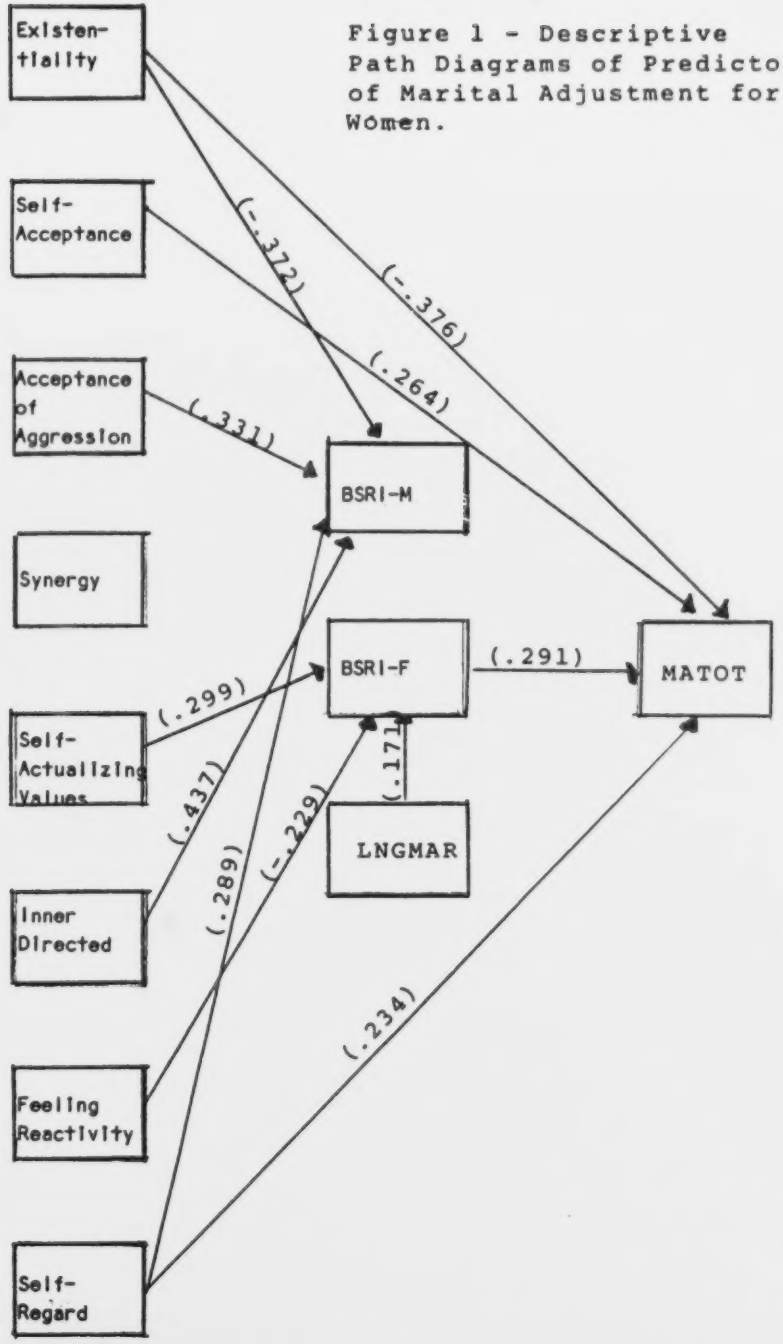

Figure 1 - Descriptive Path Diagrams of Predictors of Marital Adjustment for Women.

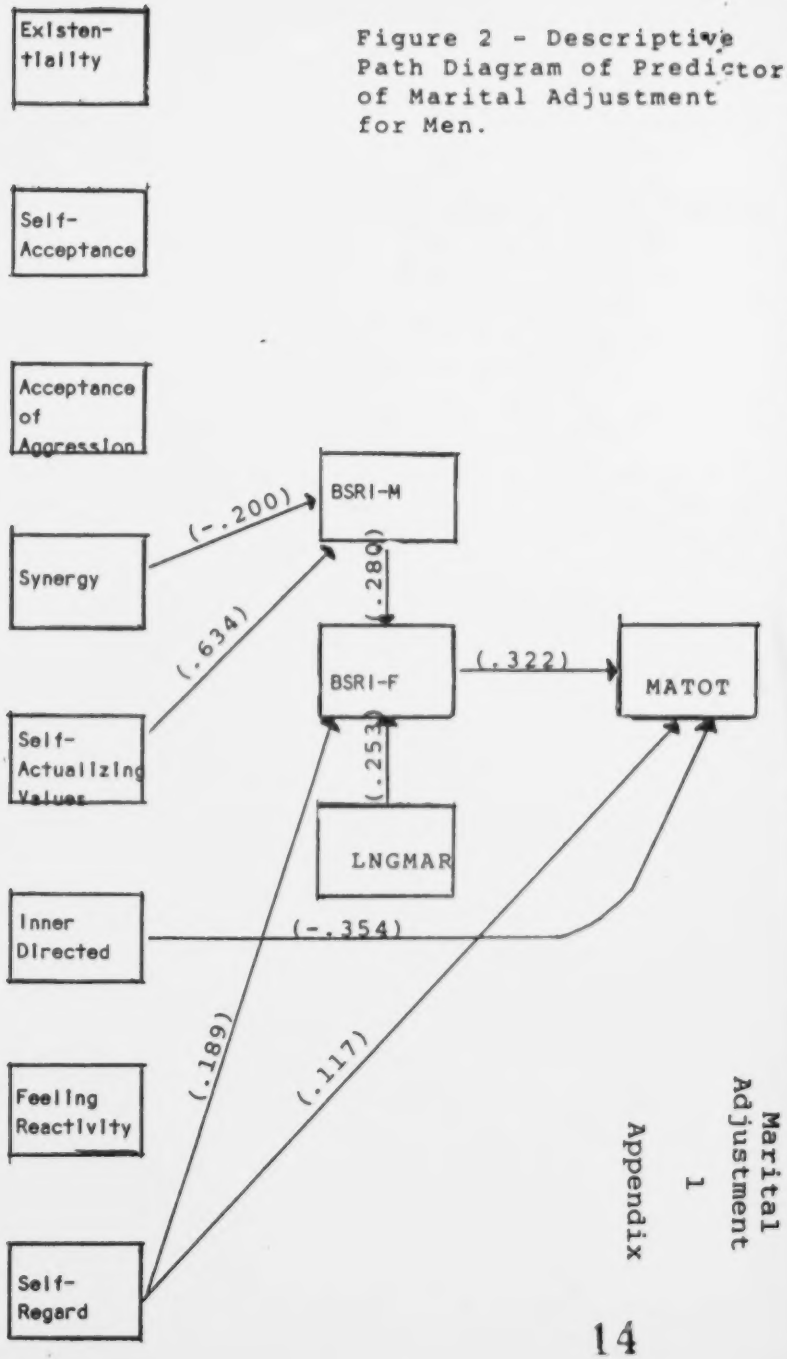

Figure 2 - Descriptive Path Diagram of Predictors of Marital Adjustment for Men.